

Like millions of Americans, I was moved by the reports and images of the terrible earthquake that struck Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on January 12. According to some estimates, this catastrophe may have taken the lives of as many as 200,000 people while displacing millions more. Throughout our history, Americans have been eager to help others recover from the devastation of wars and natural disasters in faraway places. Once again, we have seen the compassion and generosity of the American people displayed front and center in the Haiti relief effort, including an outpouring of real-time donations through cell phones and the Internet. A January 20 survey by the Chronicle of Philanthropy found that U.S. nonprofit relief organizations had raised over \$350 million in the first nine days after the earthquake.

Last week, Congress passed [legislation](#) to acknowledge the significant charitable giving by allowing Haiti-related donations made through the end of February to be claimed on taxpayers' 2009 tax returns. Thus, donors will have the opportunity to receive an immediate tax write-off instead of having to wait until they file their 2010 tax returns next year. The bill also permits taxpayers who contribute to the Haiti relief effort via cell phone text messages to use their phone bill as a record of their donation for tax purposes. As a senior member of the House Ways and Means Committee, which oversees tax laws, I was an original cosponsor of this bipartisan legislation. I am pleased to report that President Obama has signed this bill into law.